How to preserve *Ikhlas* – a few practical points

- If you have done some good actions solely to please God, helped someone or are performing obligatory or supererogatory acts of worship then know that you can never be secure from the evil of Satan and your lowly self (*nafs al-ammarah)* until the end of your life.
- You must exercise vigilance, as your low self may prompt you to make a verbal mention of it in front of your friends or acquaintances, or to express it in the way of a subtle hint without directly mentioning it. For instance, if you are regularly observing night prayers, your low self may prompt you to pass a hint by speaking about the good or bad weather conditions at daybreak or about supplications or the call for *fajr* prayers, thus polluting your act of worship with *riya*. You must, thus resist all such tendencies.
- You must keep a watch over yourself, like a kind physician or nurse, and not let the rebellious self get out of control; for a moment of neglect may give it the opportunity to break its reins and lead your sincere actions into ruin. Purification of intention from all levels of duality (*shirk)* and showing-off *(riya)*, constant vigilance over it, and its perseverance in purity makes up a difficult task.
- Try to remind yourself of your duties and judge your intention and actions in the light of following verse of the Holy Qur'an: *Say: "Truly my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.* (6:162).
- And as long as you have egoism and self-seeking, love of office and position, even if you take a step for the acquisition of divine knowledge or spiritual excellences, these will be ultimately sought for selfish ends. God-seeking and self-seeking cannot go together. Rather, if God is sought for the sake of the self, the ultimate goal is the self and the ego. [Al-Khumayni, *Forty Hadith*, chapter 20, p.8]

Conclusion:

The first step in the journey towards God is abandonment of self-love and crushing the head of egoism under one's foot**.** To the extent that one succeeds in purging his or her heart of self-love, the love of God shall enter it to the same extent and it shall also be purified of latent *shirk* (egoism).

Prophet Muhammad (s) said: "**The person who devotes himself sincerely to God for forty days, streams of wisdom will flow from his heart to his tongue**." [Al-Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*, vol.2, p. 237]

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Surely We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, therefore serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience
(Qur'an, 39:2)

Prophet Muhammad (s) said: "Certainly there is a reality of every truth and a servant cannot reach the reality of *Ikhlas* unless he doesn't like people to praise him for the actions he has done (only) for the sake of God".
[Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 72, p.304, hadith # 51]

Merits of the Soul ...

Sincerity
(*ikhlas*)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), while explaining the utterance of God Almighty, "*That He might try you (to see) which of you is fairest in works*." (67:2) said: "It does not mean one of you whose deeds are more numerous but one who is more rightful in his conduct, and this rightness is nothing but fear of God and sincerity of intention (*niyyah*) and fear." Then he (a) added: "To persevere in an action until it becomes sincere is more difficult than (performing) the action itself, and sincerity of action lies in this that you should not desire anyone to praise you for it except God Almighty, and intention supersedes action. Lo, verily, intention is action itself." Then he recited the Qur'anic verse, "*Say, everyone acts in accordance with his character* (shakilatihi)", (17:84) adding, "That *shakilah* means *niyyah*."
[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, kitab *al- iman wa al-kufr*, bab *al-'ikhlas*, hadith # 4]

The reality of *Ikhlas*

Ikhlas (sincerity) of intention, action and then perseverance on it is the highest station of love and servitude to God. *Ikhlas* is defined and explained as:

- The honourable *`arif* and the wise wayfarer, Khwajah `Abd Allah al-Ansari (qs) says: "***Ikhlas* means purging action of all impurities."** And the 'impurities' mean desire to please oneself and other creatures.
- The great scholar Shaykh al-Baha'i (ra) has narrated that the people of the heart (*those who love Allah by heart*) say that: ***"Ikhlas* means keeping action free from other-than-God having a role in it and that the performer of an action should not desire any reward for it in the world and the Hereafter."**

And Prophet Mohammad (s) said that Allah (swt) said**:** "***Ikhlas* is a secret from my secrets and I place it in the heart of my servant who is my beloved.**" [Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 70, page 249, hadith # 24]

Who are *Mukhlisun* (sincere ones) ?

God Almighty has invited His servants towards Himself by indicating that they should purify their souls from other-than-God and make them turn exclusively towards Him.

- *Mukhlisun* are those who worship God in such a way that they don't see themselves in service nor do they take notice of the world or its people, Thus they and their actions totally belong to Lord. Thus their state of worship is the '*din'* that God Almighty has chosen for Himself and cleared it from the taint of association with other-than-God, and He has said: *Lo, to God belongs sincere allegiance (al-din al-khalis).* (39:3)
- It has been narrated from the great gnostic al-Shaykh al-Muhaqqiq Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-`Arabi that he said: 'Lo, to God belongs sincere allegiance,' free from the taints of otherness and egoism. And that your extinction in Him should be total, the Essence; the Attributes, the Acts and the *din* should cease to be relevant for you. Lo, until the allegiance is not purified by reality, it will not belong to God."

The worship of the sincere ones is the imprint of the manifestations (*tajalliyat*) of the Beloved (God) and nothing passes through their hearts except the Essence of the One God.

Ikhlas is subsequent to action

One must exercise vigilance as it sometimes happens that man carries out an action faultlessly without any shortcoming and performs it without *riya'* (showing off) or *`ujb* (self-love) but after the action he becomes afflicted with *riya'* through mentioning it to others, as pointed out in the following noble hadith:

- Imam al-Baqir (a) said: "Perseverance in an action is more difficult than the act itself." He was asked, "What is meant by perseverance in action?" He (a) replied, "A man does some kindness to a relative or expends something for the sake of God, Who is One and has no partner. Thereupon the reward of a good deed performed secretly is written for him. Later, he mentions it to someone and that which was written earlier is wiped out and instead the reward of a good deed performed openly is written for him. Later, when he makes a mention of it again, the vice of *riya'* (showing off) is written for him (instead of the reward written earlier)." [Al-Kulayni *al-Kafi*, *kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr, bab al-riya*', hadith # 16]

The reality of action is intention

- It is the sincere intention and pure purpose on which depend the perfection or defectiveness of *'ibadat* (worships) and thus their validity or invalidity. Spiritual traits constitute the soul's primary character and intentions, to which actions are subservient, making up its secondary character. And as long as self-love remains in the heart and a person remains in the oppressive habitat of the self, he is not a wayfarer toward God *(musafir ila Allah);* rather, he is one of those who cling to the earth *(mukhalladun ila al-'ard). Shirk* in *`ibadah'* that encompasses all its levels is the inclusion of the good pleasure and satisfaction of anyone other than God, whether it is one's own self or someone else. If it is for someone else's satisfaction and for people, it is outward *shirk* and fiqhi *riya'.* If it is for one's own satisfaction *(rida),* it is hidden and inward *shirk.* In view of the *`urafa*' (gnostics) this also invalidates the *'ibadah* and makes it unacceptable to God. Examples of it are offering the nightly prayer (*tahajjud*) for increase in one's livelihood, or giving *zakat* for increase in one's wealth; Although those *'ibadat* are valid, and one who performs them is considered to have performed his duty and fulfilled the requirements of the *shari'ah*, they do not amount to the sincere worship of God Almighty, nor are they characterized with sincerity of intention and purity of purpose. Rather, this kind of *'ibadat* are aimed to achieve mundane purposes and to seek the objects of lowly desires. Hence the acts of such a person are not rightful.
- If a person expels the love of the world from his heart by means of self-discipline and persistent struggle against his mundane desires, he will be the same in solitude and company, inwardly and outwardly. And if someone leaves the habitat of the self to migrate to God as mentioned in the Quran: *Whoso goes forth from his house an emigrant to God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his wage will have fallen on God ...,* (4:100) and sets out on a spiritual journey, and thereafter he encounters complete annihilation *(fana'-e tamm)*, his reward lies only with God, the Exalted.